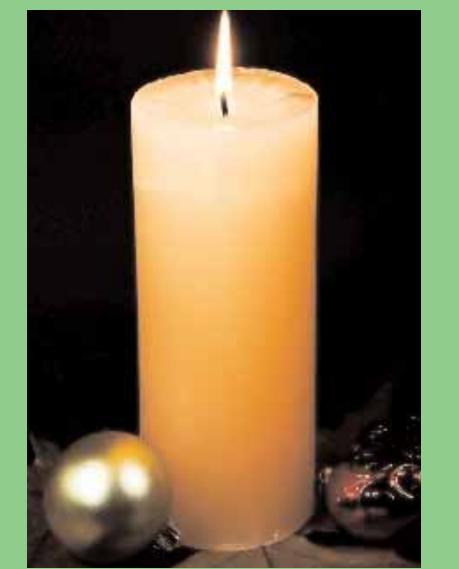


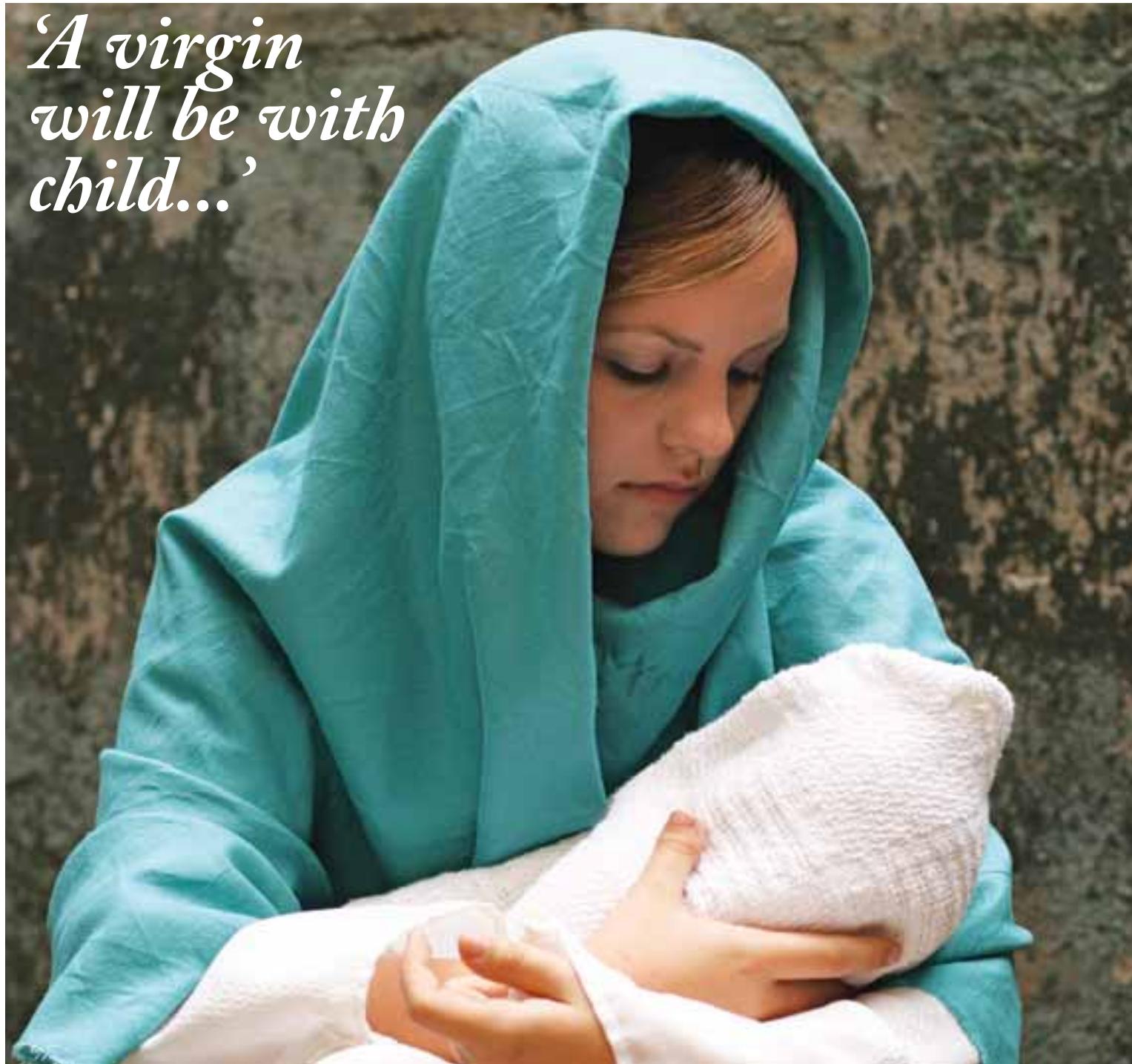
A merry Christmas and happy
New Year to all our readers



StableDoor



DIOCESE OF OXFORD Reporting from Berkshire, Buckinghamshire & Oxfordshire www.oxford.anglican.org January 2010 No. 209



*A virgin
will be with
child...'*

Inside:

2010 - The year of Sustaining the Sacred Centre
Bishop John on the heat source of life -
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20 things for 2010 - ideas to help you pray throughout the year.



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Door Post
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God in the Life of
Meet Flt Lt John Clayton, of RAF High Wycombe



PAGE 16

Plus
All the usual news, editorial and features.

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Prayer & reflection

Nourishing the heat source of life

The Rt Revd John Pritchard

delves into ways we can sustain and nurture that core of our being that is all too often left to survive on subsistence rations.

t was Christmas Eve in Oberndorf, Austria. The year was 1818. The assistant priest Joseph Mohr composed a new hymn for this special night and asked his friend Franz Gruber, the organist, to write the melody.

Sadly the organ had broken down so the priest sang tenor and played the guitar; the organist sang bass, and some local girls sang treble and alto. It was the first performance of *Silent Night*.

'It's where our passion for life is nurtured.'

Why is this carol so popular? Perhaps it's the lovely, calm melody. Perhaps it's the evocative words (*Silent night, holy night. All is calm, all is bright...*). They sum up the nostalgic memory of Christmases that never existed but which we think should have done. More likely it's the combination of both words and melody that plug us into Christmas as fast as turkey and stuffing, or the first Christmas catalogue that pops through the door in late September.

Or perhaps it's the peculiar gift of the hymn to connect with something we all reach after but which always seems to remain elusively beyond our grasp – something I call 'the sacred centre'.



Freedom. By Tim Steward. www.timsteward.co.uk

The image of a silent, holy night puts us in touch with a part of ourselves that we know needs feeding but seems constantly to be kept on starvation rations. That inner core of our being is where the heat source of our life is found. It's where the flame burns that defines us and warms others. It's where our passion for life is nurtured. It's God's home territory.

The question I'm wanting us to look at this new year of 2010 is 'How can we sustain this sacred centre more effectively and rewardingly? How can we make space for this crucial heartbeat of our lives

to flourish? Perhaps we could try sitting still for ten minutes at the start of the day to pray or 'think towards God'.

Perhaps we could make sure we have more regular walks where we reflect on what's going on in our lives and where God is in it. Perhaps we could take up painting or get a book on icons or try writing poetry. Would it be good to start saying Morning Prayer each day (your parish priest will be doing the same) or to go on retreat?

We have sent out 20,000 copies of a leaflet called 'Prayer – a Simple Guide'

just recently and have had to reprint it after only a few weeks. The hunger is there in nearly all of us. (Get in touch with the Communications Department if you've missed out.) And even extroverts need space. I often find that it's the most lively extroverts who go on retreat because they know at some instinctive level that they need to round out their personality with the opposite of their own preferred style.

'It's where the flame burns that defines us and warms others.'

Of course there's a danger in all this. I can imagine some bright teenager in their room, on being asked to come down to help with the washing up, declaring sweetly that sadly they can't come down because they're sustaining their sacred centre. We mustn't become too precious about it.

But society craves space to breathe. All the signs are that life is getting faster and faster with email and texting, twittering and social networking, instant communication and instant soundbites.

We are the only ones who can slow our own world down. Sustaining the sacred centre is about deepening our enjoyment of God and recognising God's presence in everyday life, moment by moment. It could make a world of difference, and it could make a difference to the world.

The Rt Revd John Pritchard is Bishop of Oxford. For more on sustaining the sacred centre, turn to pages eight and nine.

January prayer diary compiled by John Manley

The following is for guidance only; please feel free to adapt to local conditions and, if you wish, produce your own deanery prayer diaries.

Pray to the Father through the Son in the power of the Spirit for:

Fri 1: Charlbury with Shorthampton: clergy Judy French, Jan Fielden; LLM Penny Nairne.

Sat 2: Chipping Norton team: clergy Stephen Weston, Tony Cannon, Andrew Keith, Jenny Alidina, Jacqueline Jones; LLMs Elizabeth Mann, John Forrest, Elizabeth Allen, Mike Hall, Stephen Freer. All at Chipping Norton St Mary's (VA) School.

Mon 4: Great Tew with Little Tew: clergy Bernard Rumbold.

Tue 5: Hook Norton with Great Rollright, Swerford and Wigginton: clergy John Acreman, Wendy Cunningham, Hazel Scarr, Christopher Turner; LLM Janet Collins. All at Great Rollright (VA) and Hook Norton (VC) Schools.

Wed 6: Over with Nether Worton

Thu 7: Forest Edge: clergy Sarah Jones, Brian Ford; LLM Gail Jones. All at Finstock (VC) and Leafield (VC) Schools.

Fri 8: Shipton-under-Wychwood, Milton-under-Wychwood, Fifield and Idbury: clergy Wendy Callan, Anne Hartley. All at Wychwood

(VC) School.

Sat 9: The Chase: clergy Mark Abrey, Mary Crameri. All at Chadlington (VC) School.

Mon 11: Bray with Braywood: clergy Richard Cowles. All at Braywood (VC) and Holyport (VA) Schools.

Tue 12: Burchetts Green: clergy Keith Nicholls, Dilys Woodmoore; LLM Teresa Kennard. All at Burchetts Green (VC) School.

Wed 13: Clewer: clergy Louise Brown. All at Windsor Clewer Green (VA) and Windsor St Erf (VA) Schools.

Thu 14: Cox Green: clergy Joan Hicks, Margaret Bird.

Fri 15: Dedworth: clergy Louise Brown.

Sat 16: Furze Platt: clergy Mark Balfour, Jeremy Hyde, Beth Honey; LLMs Margaret Hyde, Brian Rose, Pat Rose; youth pastor Ben Dale; accredited lay minister Edna Conibear.

Mon 18: Boyne Hill: clergy Jeremy Harris; LLM Elizabeth Bryson. All at Maidenhead All Saints (VC), Maidenhead Altwood (VC) and Maidenhead Boyne Hill (VC) Schools.

Tue 19: Maidenhead St Andrew and St Mary Magdalene: clergy Will Stileman, Sam Allberry, Andrew Kearns; LLMs Ruth Knight, Jill Palfrey.

Wed 20: Maidenhead St Luke: clergy Richard Holroyd, Dick Cheek, Terrie Robinson;

LLMs Sonya Clarke, Noeline Page. All at Maidenhead St Luke's (VC) School.

Thu 21: New Windsor team: clergy Ainsley Swift, Mary Barnes, David Dadswell, June Faulkner, John Quick; LLM Mary Hutchinson. All at Windsor Queen Anne First (VC) and Windsor Trinity St Stephen (VC) Schools.

Fri 22: Old Windsor: All at Old Windsor St Peter's (VA) and Windsor The Royal (VA) Schools.

Sat 23: The Cookhams: clergy Michael Smith, Nick Plant, Anthony Welling; LLM Charles Walmsley. All at Cookham Holy Trinity (VC) and Cookham Dean (VA) Schools.

Mon 25: Waltham St Lawrence: clergy David Andrew Andy Hartropp.

Tue 26: White Waltham with Shottesbrooke: clergy David Andrew, Andy Hartropp; LLM Carole Perkins. All at White Waltham (VC) School.

Wed 27: The chaplains of independent schools in the diocese.

Thu 28: The chaplains of the colleges of Oxford University.

Fri 29: The chaplains of Oxford Brookes University, Reading University and Bucks New University.

Sat 30: The ecumenical team of chaplains in Mission in Work and Economic Life.

Sundays

When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. (NRSV Matt. 2:10-12)

3 JAN: Chipping Norton deanery: area dean Judy French, lay chair Ian Henderson, secretary Janice McCallum, treasurer Michael Waring, adviser for the spiritual care of older people Jan Fielden. The people, wardens, PCCs and support staff of the deanery. Those returning to school and work, and those looking for work. Our plans to develop good and effective communications across the deanery; for our Churchwardens' evenings; for our walking together in the way of Christ.

10 JAN: Maidenhead & Windsor deanery: area dean Jeremy Hyde, lay chair Martin Chandler, secretary David Morgan, treasurer Jim Tucker, ecumenical representative Richard Holroyd, chaplains to the deaf Vera Hunt and Ben Whitaker. For the Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand & Polynesia, primate William Brown Turei. Those whose lives have been severely affected by floods and drought.

17 JAN: The members of the Mothers' Union within the diocese; for a new president and chaplain. The Anglican Church of Australia, primate Philip Aspinall. The Queen and all the royal family and those who work and worship at Windsor Castle.

24 JAN: The work of the Sunday Schools and all youth work in the diocese. The Church of Bangladesh, primate Paul Sarkar. Parish and district councillors serving the people of the deanery of Maidenhead and Windsor.

31 JAN: Igreja Episcopal Anglicana do Brasil (Anglican Church of Brazil), primate Mauricio Araujo da Andrade. Parish and county councillors serving the people of the deanery of Chipping Norton.

Church groups call for climate justice

By Jo Duckles

'THE earth is increasingly unwell – and as always, it's the poorest countries that suffer most,' said Bishop of Oxford, the Rt Revd John Pritchard.

Bishop John's comments came as he called on world leaders to take brave decisions during the Copenhagen climate change summit. And across Oxfordshire, Berkshire and Buckinghamshire, church goers got involved with campaigning to make Copenhagen count.

As *the Door* went to press churches across the world were preparing to take part in a bell ringing action on Sunday 13 December. Churches in Denmark were set to ring their bells at the end of a high profile celebration at the Lutheran Cathedral in Copenhagen. The Danish ringing was to be echoed across the world, with York minster and Westminster Cathedral taking part in the UK. Bell-ringers at St Frideswides, Oxford and St Michael and All Angels, New Marston, were also planning to join in.

A week earlier crowds of Christians headed to The Wave march for climate justice in London, which saw crowds of up

to 50,000 people surround Parliament on December 5. The crowds included people of all ages, wearing blue and with hands and faces painted blue.

The huge Christian presence was made clear by the amount of placards from organisations including A Rocha, Christian Aid, CAFOD and Tearfund.

Richard Riggs, a retired electronics engineer and A Rocha church representative at Christ Church, Abingdon, said: 'There was a wonderful atmosphere and it was great to see Christians taking a lead on something like this. I was talking to one man who didn't know much about it, who was surprised so many Christians were taking part. He thought it was just a bunch of greens.'

Kelly Cunningham, of St Clement's Church, Oxford, who works in publishing and is a voluntary youth worker, said: 'I went to The Wave to add my voice to the protest. Climate change is something we need to tackle and as Christians we need to be responsible stewards of the earth and its resources.'

People had to be turned away from an ecumenical service held earlier in the day at Methodist Central Hall, Westminster,



Bishop Stephen is pictured at Westminster with members of All Saints', Ascot Heath. Below is Kelly Cunningham, of St Clement's, Oxford at the Wave.

because of the crowds it attracted. The service was led by Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams and the Catholic Archbishop of Westminster, Vincent Nichols. Bishop of Reading, the Rt Revd Stephen Cottrell, was one of those who took part.

ONLINE

For more on the Copenhagen summit see:
www.oxford.anglican.org/environment



Redevelopment at Holy Trinity



THE Bishop of Buckingham, the Rt Revd Alan Wilson led a dedication service to mark the completion of a £900,000 redevelopment project at Holy Trinity, Aylesbury.

It has taken over 10 months to complete the work, which has included renovation of the tower, a new foyer and a new extension. Donations from

church members paid for the work. Vicar, the Revd Andrew Blyth, said: 'Only a few years ago people feared the church might have to be pulled down because of structural problems. But now, with God's blessing, generous giving and hard work, here it is ready to serve the local community with new facilities and new activities.'

IN BRIEF

Raising a smile

ST LAURENCE CE School in Warborough, Oxfordshire has linked up with the NASIO Trust, which supports projects with orphaned and destitute children in Kenya.

The trust provides food, clothing and educational resources for HIV orphaned children. The school started its partnership with the trust by raising £200 at a Raise a Smile evening of entertainment last month. The event included music and comedy as well as a presentation on the trust's work in Kenya. Headteacher Nic Cooper said: 'St Laurence and the Nasio Trust are at the beginning of what they hope will be a fruitful relationship, which will open up the worldwide community for all the children.'

Benson's bell tower re-opens



BISHOP of Dorchester, the Rt Revd Colin Fletcher, took part in a special dedication service for the newly refurbished bell tower.

Earlier this year the eight bells were removed for a new metal frame to replace an old rotting wooden one. During the service Bishop Colin accompanied by the Revd Andrew Hawken, churchwarden Jenny English and the Benson ringers, who rang the bells to celebrate the re-hanging.

Books wanted

DO you seriously need all the books on your shelves? If not, you may have books suitable for clergy of Kimberley and Kuruman in South Africa.

If you have, take them to Church House, Oxford and they will be taken to K&K to form a small lending library at the cathedral. We ideally would like books published no earlier than 1990. For more information or advice email olivia.graham@oxford.anglican.org or call 01865 208246.

Stephen Verney

WE note with sadness the death of the Rt Revd Stephen Verney, aged 90, in November.

Bishop Verney studied at Balliol College Oxford. He was appointed Canon of St George's Chapel Windsor in the 1970s. A former Bishop of Repton, he spent his retirement in Blewbury in Oxfordshire and served as an assistant bishop in the diocese. Former Bishop of Oxford, Lord Harries of Pentragarth, said: 'Stephen was a remarkable man, a genuinely charismatic leader, whilst remaining holy and humble.' For a full obituary see www.oxford.anglican.org/news

Our own 'Unsung Heroes'



CONGRATULATIONS to Dawn Castle, from Epwell and George Fenemore, from Deddington who reached the finals of the *Country Life* Unsung Heroes competition.

Dawn, a retired PE teacher, was nominated by her fellow church warden, David Long, especially for her imaginative work with children in the village. She is pictured above, in the centre, on the set of her latest production. She was one of two runners-up in the contest and was highly commended by the judges. George is also a church warden, a chorister, actor, a worker in wrought iron. He is pictured above with candles he has made from wax from his own bee hives. Dawn and George were among 12 finalists invited to a ceremony at Lambeth Palace in December. Full details in the latest edition of *Country Life*.



Pic: KT Bruce

A special appeal on behalf of homeless young people

Will you sponsor a room at Centrepoint?

Your gift of £12 a month – just 40p a day – will help a homeless young person get off the streets for good

Centrepoint is the national charity dedicated to transforming the lives of homeless young people. Today, we are searching for individuals who share our belief that these young men and women should not be 'written-off' by society but instead deserve care, support and a second chance.

Will you sponsor a Centrepoint room today and see how your gifts offer a young person a safe home and the support and training they need to make a new start?

A life on the streets can mean death on the streets

Over half the young people we see have slept rough, placing them in great danger. In some cases, it takes just hours for them to be approached by drug dealers and pimps. Young people we work with have seen their friends beaten, raped, murdered and die of overdoses.

Young people don't choose this life. Instead, they find themselves homeless having fled sexual abuse, violence and family breakdown. They would rather face danger on the streets than more pain at home.

We believe that these young people deserve compassion and support. Yet they experience constant hardship, prejudice and abuse. Under these conditions, their health, self-respect and hopes for the future can be quickly destroyed.

Will you sponsor a Centrepoint room for a young person like Sophie?

"I was beaten constantly," says Sophie. "I was black and blue."

Visit www.centrepointroom.org.uk/door3 or call 0800 23 23 20

Will you sponsor a Centrepoint room and give a homeless young person a better life?

- I wish to sponsor a room at £12 a month
- I wish to sponsor two rooms at £24 a month
- I wish to sponsor _____ rooms at £_____ a month

Please collect my payment on the 1st/15th of every month
(please circle preferred date)

Instruction to your Bank or Building Society to pay by Direct Debit

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Postcode _____

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Bank Sort Code: **- -**

Account Number: **- - - -**

Instructions to your Bank or Building Society: Please pay Centrepoint Direct Debits from the account detailed in this instruction, subject to the safeguards assured by the Direct Debit Guarantee. I understand that this instruction may remain with Centrepoint and, if so, details will be passed electronically to my Bank/Building Society.

Signature(s) _____ Date _____

Banks and Building Societies may not accept Direct Debit instructions for some types of account



Full Name _____

Address _____

Postcode _____

Telephone _____

Please tick this box and complete your details if you would like to receive email communications from Centrepoint

Email _____

In accordance with the 1998 Data protection Act, we hold your details to provide you with updates and appeals. If you do not wish to receive these please contact Centrepoint.

Under the Government's Gift Aid scheme, all donations made by UK tax payers are worth almost a third more.

I am a UK tax payer and would like Centrepoint to claim back the tax on all donations I have made for the six years prior to this year, and all donations I make from the date of this declaration until I notify you otherwise. I understand that I must have paid an amount of income tax or capital gains tax at least equal to the tax you reclaim on my donations (at least 28p for each £1 donated).

Date / /

Please return this form to:
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Central House, 25 Camperdown Street,
London E1 8DZ. Thank you**

Registered Charity No 292411 RAP0910V03



centre point give homeless young people a future

Could you change someone's life?



Right now, a homeless young person desperately needs a safe place to stay.
Will you sponsor a room at Centrepoint for them?

To protect the privacy of those we help, a model has been used for the photograph.

of us take for granted, like how to budget, pay bills and cook.

Become a sponsor and see exactly how your gifts change a young person's life

By sponsoring a room with Centrepoint, you'll ensure that vulnerable young people get the chances in life they deserve. But you don't have to take our word for it. When you become a sponsor, you'll get access to a virtual version of your room online, as well as regular updates – showing the difference your sponsorship is making.

Young people urgently need your support. Will you sponsor a room at Centrepoint?

Together, we can give homeless young people the opportunity to get back on their feet. But we cannot fund this vital work without your support today. So please, fill in the form below.

Call 0800 23 23 20, or visit www.centrepointroom.org.uk/door3

Thank you in advance for your help.

Just 40p a day

Your questions answered

How often will the residents in my room change?

It may take up to two years before a young person is ready to leave Centrepoint. We will keep you informed on your room's residents through regular updates.

Will it be possible to meet the young person in the room I am sponsoring?

The safety and privacy of young people is our number-one priority so we are unable to arrange visits. You can send messages for young people c/o our Head Office, although we can not guarantee a direct response from the young person.

Will I be the only sponsor of the room?

If we only allowed one person to sponsor each room, we would have to set the price of room sponsorship much higher. So we allow several people to sponsor each room.

Will the young person in my sponsored room have my name and address?

No. All correspondence is via our Head Office. The young person in your room never has your contact details and you won't have theirs. This will protect your mutual safety and privacy.

Can I give more than £12 a month?

We are of course very happy for you to give more than £12 a month or to sponsor multiple rooms. Simply indicate your preference on the form.

What will I receive?

- A regular report; keeping you in touch with the young person's progress.
- A virtual recreation of your room online that you can log into using personal login details.
- Help from a dedicated Centrepoint Room Sponsorship Coordinator; on hand to answer your questions and correspondence.

Your regular gift will be used to assist young people in sponsored rooms and for the general purposes of Centrepoint – working with homeless and socially excluded young people.

Spotlight on Christmas in...

The Door asked the bishops in our link dioceses in Sweden and South Africa what Christmas is like for them.

Växjö Sweden

OUR Christmas season starts on the First Sunday in Advent, writes **the Rt Revd Sven Thidevall**. It is a big church Sunday. If you didn't go to church during the rest of the year you definitely come now to sing the well-known Advent hymns.

December 13 is **Luciadagen**, the day we commemorate the Italian Saint Lucia. Lucia was a girl who professed her faith by sharing her wealth with the poor. Her boyfriend dragged her to court, hoping she would deny her faith and stop giving money away. But she confessed and was sentenced to death. In Sweden young girls dress in white as part of the Luciadagen celebrations. This festival comes with light when the days are dark, and reminds us that Christmas is approaching. We always wish for snow at Christmas in Sweden. In the north there is always snow, but here in the South, Christmas is often green.

On **Christmas Eve**, children and their families come to church to build the nativity scene. After that the first and most important Christmas meal is served. We don't have roast turkey with all the trimmings. We have a buffet or smorgasbord with a huge ham and different fish dishes and Jansson, a gratin



The Bishop's house at Östrabo in Växjö at Christmas.
Inset: Bishop Sven.



of potato, anchovies, fried onions and cream. The food is special and there is plenty of it. In the afternoon we gather around the TV and finally the time comes to open all the parcels under the Christmas tree. In the evening we have rice porridge with cinnamon and milk and after that its time to try out all the gifts. The day ends with Midnight Mass.

Christmas Day is calm and peaceful. The special Morning Service might start as early as 5am, but fortunately in our church it starts a couple of hours later. It is dark and cold outside. Inside the church the candles create a special light and warmth. Together with the songs and the readings this creates an exceptional service, where Jesus Christ as the Light of

the world is illustrated in a very physical way. Afterwards we have rice porridge again, with some friends.

After the service we have breakfast – rice porridge again – with some friends. Then it feels really good to take a long pause. Later on we enjoy the ham, the fish and Jannsons left over from Christmas Eve's buffet, and relax. This is probably the moment I like most during Christmas. I guess it is because the houses and the streets are more peaceful on this day than on any other day of the year.

The third day is **Annandag Jul** or Boxing Day. Boxing Day is a rather social day, when we travel around to meet relatives and friends.

Kimberley and Kuruman, South Africa

In Kimberley we join our Christian siblings in the Northern hemisphere singing renditions of *In The Bleak Mid-winter*, writes **the Rt Revd Ossie Swartz**. And we do so while wiping copious beads of sweat from the brow because it's almost 40 degrees Celsius over here, which means there's unlikely ever to be a white Christmas for us.

When Christmas arrives we have already been bombarded by amplified strains of Christmas carols and all shapes and sizes of Father Christmases beckoning us to part with our cash in the department stores. On that level, the commercialism of Christmas here is hardly different from in other parts of the world.

But Christmas is a family time for us in South Africa. It is one of the occasions when Ubuntu comes into its own. Ubuntu is a South African philosophical concept that emphasizes the importance of community, sharing and generosity. We visit each other and on the day you are quite likely to be part of a extended family gathered around a laden dinner table.

Ah! The fare. Not exactly what you would have on your table in England Brussels sprouts? Not likely! Turkey? Definitely, yes, in many homes. But we will also have a choice of gammon along with all the meats that will grace our table.

It is a day for feasting, for fun and fellowship. We go absolutely mad in selecting presents and some of these are exchanged after the midnight service. We then do the rest of the exchange of presents when we meet for the great Christmas lunch – usually at Granny's or



Bishop Ossie is pictured right, with Bishop of Dorchester, the Rt Revd Colin Fletcher.

the home of another matriarch who represents family unity.

Christmas is a wonderful time of celebrating with lively worship services that can go on for several hours. We also decorate our homes, switch on the fairy lights and make it such a festive occasion. We bring on the mistletoe, but we don't really go for the kissing bit!

My favourite moment comes after the hurly-burly and mad dash for presents, when I sit in the Cathedral and it's all nice and quiet. The mad world has come to a stop and suddenly the strains of *Once in royal David's city* fill the church. The glorious service of nine lessons and carols is underway – Christmas is here! "Tis the season to be jolly", yes, but much more a time to hear again the exhortation for us to "hush the noise, ye men of strife and hear the angels sing..."

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TOP TV chef Jamie Oliver joined forces with a spiritual offshoot of the Spice Girls last night. Jamie and his wife Jools, USA and global citizens, performed a special service at the Tabernacle in London. Jamie said: "I'm going to do my best to make sure that every word I say is inspiring and uplifting." Jamie and Jools' performance was the highlight of the service, which was attended by thousands of people. The service was held to mark the 10th anniversary of the Tabernacle.

SEE STORY ON PAGE 10

CLIQUE, HO HO Hallelujah - PLYMOUTH STRIKER BECOMES A NATIONAL HERO: SEE BACK PAGE

TOP CHEF DANNY BOY TO KICK OFF THE NEW YEAR WITH A CELEBRATION AT THE TABERNACLE. SEE PAGE 11

Pick one. Just one.

Save their life for £150. You'll end up smiling too.



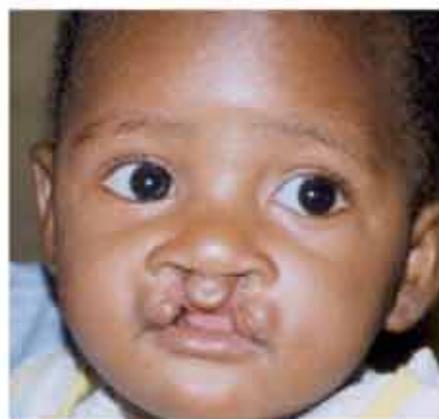
Anu, 2 years,
India



Eduardo, 6 months,
Peru



Nisa, 4 years,
Indonesia



Kabir, 7 months,
Nigeria



Guo Sen, 6 months,
China



On Sokhorn, 13 months,
Cambodia

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A healthy diet is a crucial part of pregnancy for every woman and it can help to prevent birth defects. Make sure you eat plenty of fruits and vegetables and take a multivitamin with 400 micrograms of folic acid every day for a month before conception and throughout early pregnancy. Folic acid has been shown to reduce the risk of neural tube defects of the brain and spinal cord (such as spina bifida) in unborn children by between 50 and 70% when taken before conception and during the first trimester, and it could also help to reduce the risk of cleft lip and palate. It is also important to stop smoking when you are pregnant and to avoid foods such as raw or smoked seafood, raw shellfish and eggs, soft cheese, unpasteurized milk, and pâté. Speak to your GP for further advice about having a healthy pregnancy, and if you would like any more information about why clefts occur, how clefts can be repaired with surgery, or about caring for a child born with a cleft, please visit www.smiletrain.org.uk today.

Family

Helping children at risk

Patrick McDonald tells **Jo Duckles** about his journey from being a grief stricken, fatherless 12-year-old to setting up international children's charity **Viva**.

It was Patrick's own experience of God as a father to him when his dad died that inspired this now permanently smiling 35-year-old to set up Viva. Patrick, who has recently completed an MBA, was waiting for his wife Emily to give birth to their fourth child, when I interviewed him at his offices on Oxford's Cowley Road.

He is a far cry from the troubled teenager who moved away from home in Denmark at the tender age of 15. As the youngest of three children, living in a large house on top of a hill, he said all was well until he was five. 'We were in a very bad car crash and my middle brother, then 10, was killed. It broke my father's back and my mother's heart.' He said the crash left his family troubled. 'My mother and father split up, and my dad gave up his quantum physics career to become a teacher trainer on the same site as my school. He became my primary care giver.' Exposure to radiation gave Patrick's father bone marrow cancer and he died on September 5, 1986.

'My brother came up the hill towards the house and told me "the old man had died." I walked to the back of the garden and began to run. I ran for as long as I could before I tripped over some twigs and cried tears of despair. At that moment I had a very powerful experience. On the ground I first had a strong sense of God walking up to me, kneeling down and giving me a hug.'

Patrick became a keen ornithologist, tagging birds for the University of Copenhagen. 'I'd get up at 4am, go to the woods, go to school at 8am, then afterwards go back to the woods.'



Inset: Patrick. Above and bottom right are children helped by Viva.
Pics: Viva

'This was time with my heavenly father. People were worried that

I was a lonely boy. I wasn't in a church but I realised Jesus wanted to be my friend and he was a father to me. What I failed to realise was that he not only knew and loved me, but that he had a purpose for my life.'

Patrick drifted into Denmark's green movement, eventually moving to Belfast in the hope that the IRA would train him as a green terrorist. 'Instead I ended up connecting with a group of people from Youth With A Mission,' he says. The group included a Danish knight, Robert Beck. 'He was a former Supreme Court judge, a very venerable man and a captain of industry. He sat me down and taught me scripture.'

After three months of Bible study, Patrick decided the Bible was either an elaborate but consistent fake or it really was the word of God. He decided to test the theory by hitchhiking around Europe. 'I put myself in a place where I needed God. I had no money and I was homeless.' During this time Patrick realised, he says to his horror, that the Bible was true. 'I say horror because the claims of Christ and his commands are fundamentally different to what most

people, even most Christians, are prepared to really embrace.'

While hitchhiking Patrick found a leaflet about street kids in Hurlach Castle, Germany. 'I thought there couldn't be that many street kids in the world and discovered there was work done through YWAM in Bolivia.' He hitch hiked home, picked up the telephone in his mum's house volunteered to join them in Bolivia. He became superintendent of a soup kitchen and after seeing two street children lost in horrific circumstances, found himself, aged 17, heartbroken and asking God what his plan was for these children.

'I had a sense that God wanted me to do more, and wondered at the time if he wanted me to stay and just run a soup kitchen on a Tuesday or if there were other ways of helping children more effectively. I had no commitments and was ready to stay in Bolivia but I needed to be sure of a sense of hope and God's vision, otherwise the desperate situations we saw daily would have driven me to despair.'

Then, late one night on the streets Patrick had a powerful vision to see the countless local churches around Latin America mobilised, equipped and networked to better reach children. He met Emily, who was working in a

Mennonite children's home, while in Bolivia and he followed her to Oxford, where she was studying.

It was here they started the 'Half Holy Club' (a play on the name of the 'Holy Club' founded by John and Charles Wesley) at Magdalen College. The prayer meeting of undergraduates soon set up their first 'office' in a red telephone box on Pembroke Street, Oxford.

'What we are called to do is to find out what God is doing and connect people together in networks that can equip and resource them. When local projects work together they can powerfully transform their community,' says Patrick. And that's what he's been doing ever since. He says Viva, which now employs 126 staff, has 3,000 volunteers and serves one million children across 43 countries, but is still embryonic.

As the *Door* went to press Viva staff and volunteers were busy selling tickets for Christmas parties for children at risk in countries across the world. Those parties involve lots of food, a big cake, silly games and everything you would expect for children at Christmas. But they allow staff and project leaders from different organisations in a specific area to link up and strengthen the services they offer, making a real difference in the lives of those children.



ONLINE

See www.viva.org, email info@viva.org find out more or call 01865 811660 to find out more.

Stage Fright for Wokingham youth



STAGE Fright After School Theatre clubs in Wokingham have been exploring hope as a way in to the Christmas story this year.

Last year the teenagers devised a harrowing play based on a Cambodian family ripped apart by the Khmer Rouge in the 1970s.

This year their Christmas show (pictured left) is taking a more traditional theme, looking at the Nativity from the ancient and contemporary perspective.

Since 2007 Stage Fright Youth Theatre clubs have produced contemporary interpretations of parables, gospel stories and modern experiences of faith – always with a twist.

The group welcome new members and enthusiastic adults as helpers - contact office@stage-fright.org.uk or phone 0118 979 0098.

Anna Adams

Win a children's Bible in this month's double draw

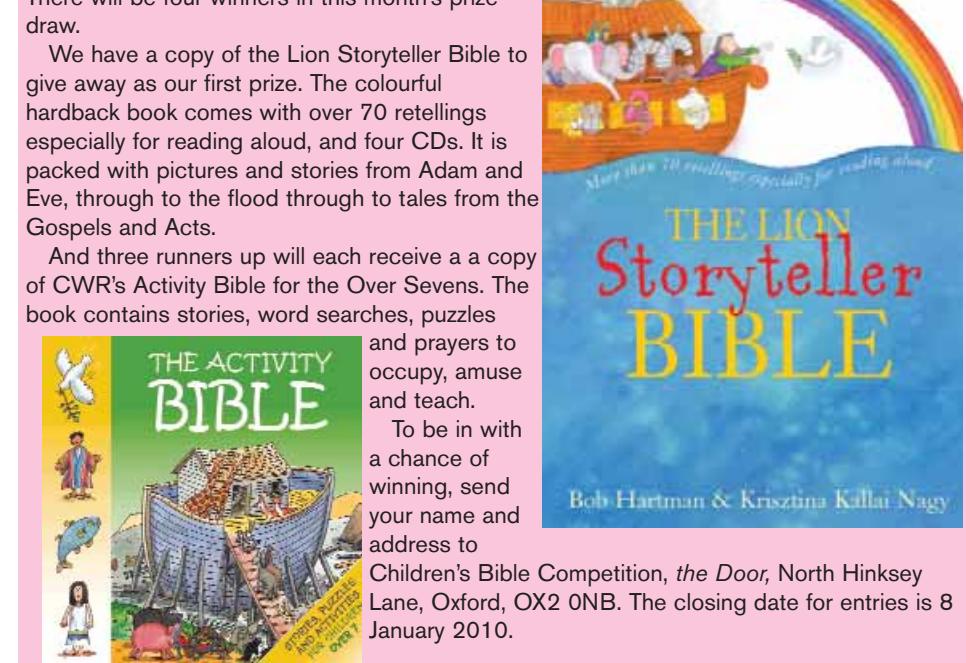
There will be four winners in this month's prize draw.

We have a copy of the Lion Storyteller Bible to give away as our first prize. The colourful hardback book comes with over 70 retellings especially for reading aloud, and four CDs. It is packed with pictures and stories from Adam and Eve, through to the flood through to tales from the Gospels and Acts.

And three runners up will each receive a copy of CWR's Activity Bible for the Over Sevens. The book contains stories, word searches, puzzles and prayers to occupy, amuse and teach.

To be in with a chance of winning, send your name and address to

Children's Bible Competition, *the Door*, North Hinksey Lane, Oxford, OX2 0NB. The closing date for entries is 8 January 2010.



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Email:acrustell@tiscali.co.uk

Feature**Twenty**

There are many different ways of praying. The phrase '**sustaining the sacred centre**' invites us to find then nurture, the ways of praying that are right for us. It is also about developing the links between the prayers we offer and the lives we lead. Here are some ideas you could try during 2010.

1. Talk to someone about your prayer life and relationship with God.

It could be your parish priest, or just anyone you trust; but there is also a network of spiritual directors in the diocese called Spi-Dir. You can get more information at www.soulfriend.org.uk.

Where was the place you became a Christian? Who helped you on the way? Is there a special place where you feel or have felt closest to God? Revisit these people and places. Get back in touch with, and be renewed by, your first experiences of the Christian life.

www.praywithoutceasing.org/uk/zideas.htm
www.cofe.anglican.org/worship/learnprayer.htm

13. Prepare carefully for Sunday.

Find out the readings and look at them or so before the service.

**14. Learn how to sit still!**

Many of the world's problems are caused by our busyness, our lack of reflection, our undue haste. Sitting still could transform the world!

Or if you are one of life's active ones...

15. Go for a walk! Or a run!

Or a workout at the gym. But dedicate the time to active reflection.

16. Do something new!

Climb a mountain, write a poem, plant a seed, strip an engine, learn a language – enjoy becoming a learner again and do something you've never done before.

17. Re-visit an old skill.

Pick up that forgotten violin. Get out the water colours. Dig that vegetable patch. Rediscover something in your life that got mislaid on the way.

18. Live differently.

Learn how to inhabit this planet more carefully. Don't leave the TV on standby. Turn down the thermostat. Slow down the car. Get out the bike. Visit the farm shop.

19. Say sorry.

The story of the gospel is one of generosity and forgiveness. Many of us are still encumbered by the weight of our sin. Lay this burden down. See a priest to make a sacramental confession. Talk to a trusted Christian friend. Take hold of the gospel of peace and be free.

20. Count your blessings!

Say thank you more often! It has been noted that adults' prayers usually begin with the word 'please' and children's with the word 'thank-you'. Be a bit more child-like in your praying.

3. Go to a bible study group or Lent group this year.

(Your vicar should be able to point you in the right direction.)

4. Visit a garden or nature reserve.

Contact the Quiet Garden Trust, founded by Philip Rodderick, a priest in this diocese www.quietgarden.co.uk/

5. Go on pilgrimage.

You could go to anywhere in the country, but in our own diocese why not visit our Cathedral, or Dorchester Abbey or the holy well at Frilsham?

6. Read a Christian book.

Ask your Vicar or a friend for recommendations.

7. Revisit your first love.**8. Pray online.**

The sisters of the Community of St Mary the Virgin at Wantage have developed all sorts of online prayer resources. You can join them live for offices. A weekly meditation is posted every Saturday at www.csmv.co.uk/. There are other online resources at:

www.cofe.anglican.org/worship/dailyprayer
www.pray-as-you-go.org/
www.rejesus.co.uk.site/module/daily_prayers
<http://sacredspace.ie/>
[www.prayasyougo.org](http://prayasyougo.org)

9. Read a book of the Bible all the way through in one go.

Why not try Mark's gospel? Or one of Paul's letters?

10. Learn some prayers or some passages from scripture by heart.**11. Say grace before meals**

www.prayer-and-prayers.info/dinnerblessings.saying-grace-before-meals.htm

12. Pray with other people.

Christian prayer is supposed to be a corporate activity. Find a prayer partner or form a small prayer group. Ideas can be found in Bishop Stephen's book *Praying through life* (CHP) or in the Mothers' Union resource.

Other resources:

Twenty things for Twenty-ten was prepared by the Worship, Prayer and Spirituality Group of the Oxford diocese.

6 things for 2010

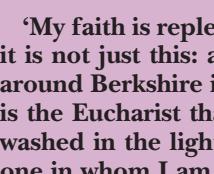


The Bishops' views on Sustaining the Sacred Centre

'When I was Archdeacon of Canterbury I once went on retreat and realised I was in danger. I knew a bit about theology and a bit about pastoral care; I knew something about synods and the Church Representative Rules (sad, I know); I knew a bit about church finance and how to run a parish. And I realised to my horror that I could do all of my work as an archdeacon, *almost entirely without reference to God*, except as a symbol. That was the abyss. I wasn't in it yet, but I realised then that nourishing my relationship with God was the absolute and most important task of my life. I've been at it ever since.' *Bishop John (Oxford)*



'Two things have become increasingly important to me in my prayer life in the past five years. The first is a print of the crucifixion by Craigie Aitchison. There is something about its simplicity and pain that leaves me endlessly fascinated, yet the background colour is a wonderful golden yellow reminding me that the cross was a place of triumph as well as of desolation. Both those themes come back to me time and again when I am praying and lead me to want to discover more. The second, very simply, is to turn off the radio when I am driving and to focus instead on the news or the music, on the place I am driving through or whatever is next in my diary. The disadvantage is that some places get prayed for more than others, but the advantage is to have a time of leisurely prayer which is something I often miss out on'. *Bishop Colin (Dorchester)*



'My faith is replenished and sustained in many ways. The daily office is vital. It builds me. But it is not just this: a book of poems is never far from my reach; I've measured out my journeys around Berkshire in pieces of music. All this brings me close to God. But more than anything, it is the Eucharist that sustains me. 'I stand at the altar,' writes Thomas Merton, 'with my eyes all washed in the light of eternity and become one who is agelessly reborn.... I am superseded by one in whom I am fully real...' This is my experience and my joy.' *Bishop Stephen (Reading)*



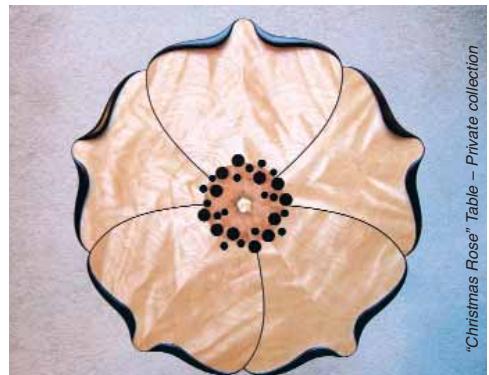
'Near my sacred centre is the book of psalms — what Cardinal Hume called the greatest contribution the Jewish people have made to civilisation. Having gone to college where the entire psalter was sung every two months, I got to know them well, quirks, warts, glories and all. All human life is there, fear and hope, longing and faith. I go to monasteries to decompress and reorientate on God, loaded with stuff, that unravels gently against the unfolding stream of the psalms as they are sung. The "stuff" settles out at various levels of real concern as it is brought to, rubs up against, and then is enfolded into, that of the whole people of God in Scripture. That's when I know God is close, sees me from the inside out, and I don't have to pretend about anything.' *Bishop Alan (Buckingham)*

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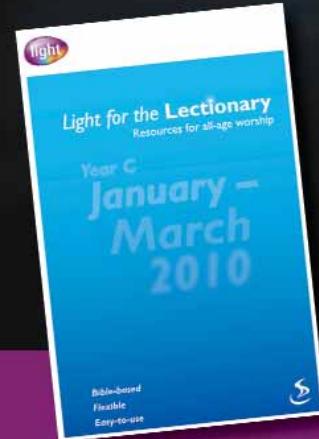
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In addition to the wealth of news and editorial from the diocese, Cornerstone Vision publish advertising features on a variety of different subjects.

There are special discounted rates for advertising in these features. It's feasible to advertise in just *The Door* to reach a localised audience or indeed to book throughout various papers in the group attracting a larger discount against our normal rate card prices. Some of the features lined up are:

February

Lent

Help the Aged

Schools and Education

Fairtrade Fortnight (starts 22nd)

March

Lent

Equip yourselves for life (Bible Colleges/further education)

Retreats and Quiet Breaks

April

Care and Mobility

Schools and Education

Places to Visit

May

Places to Visit

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Mission (training and opportunities)

Christian Resources Exhibition (Esher)

June/July

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Schools and Educational

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For details, please contact the Administrator on: Telephone Number: 01865 511239 Wyndham House, Plantation Road, Oxford OX2 6JJ www.wyndhamhousing.org.uk

SPEAKING OUT FOR THE ELDERLY

Many people know the charity Age Concern for the many services that it provides for the elderly, but the organisation which has teamed up with Help the Aged provides a powerful political voice on behalf of our senior citizens.

Speaking about the Care Quality Commission's annual performance assessment review, Andrew Harrop, Head of Public Policy for Age Concern and Help the Aged, said: "While the overall standards of care have improved from last year, it's not acceptable that ratings for care homes for older people are lagging

behind homes for younger age groups.

"The report clearly shows that many service providers are still not up to scratch on basic standards of care that are vital for the well-being and welfare of older people.

"Many older people often cannot access the care and support they need at home because of creeping eligibility restrictions and a postcode lottery of service provision.

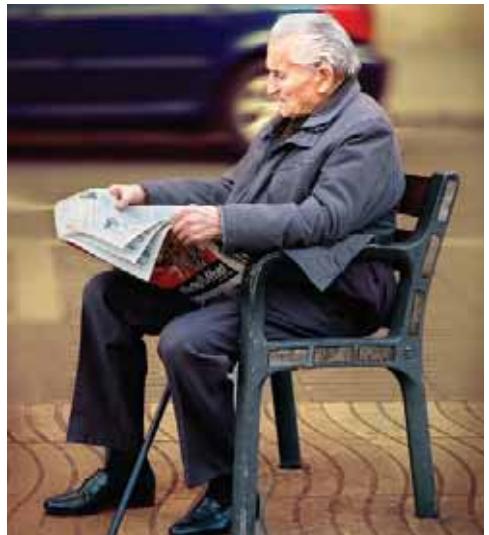
"By restricting home care to those who only meet the highest criteria, local councils continue to deny many older people the care they need to live dignified and independent lives.

"The Government must ensure

that the CQC is adequately resourced to carry out inspections more frequently to drive up standards and ensure that older people and their families have the most up-to-date information to make informed decisions about their care.

"We welcome recent proposals from the parties to improve the social care system.

"However, with the long term reforms proposed by the government not due to come into force until at least 2014, we are calling for an additional £370 million a year in additional funding in the Pre-Budget Report to ensure that care services do not deteriorate further."



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The Doorpost is a free service for churches to advertise their events and is designed to be hung on church noticeboards. Please send your events to doorpost@oxford.anglican.org or by post to Church House. The deadline for the February 2010 issue is 8 January 2010.

Friday 1 January

ABINGDON: Christian Aid Walk. Starts from St Helen's Church at 10.30am - walk to Drayton Church centre.

Sunday 10 January

COOKHAM: Holy Trinity are holding a carol service for Epiphany at 6.30pm. Hymns, readings, choir carols and prayers reflecting upon Christmas and looking to the church year ahead.

ABINGDON: St Helen's Church at 4.30pm. Epiphany carols and readings followed by tea at 5.30pm. Families especially welcomed.

Sunday 17 January

ABINGDON: St Helen's Church at 4.30pm. Come and sing Handel's Messiah. Teas served at 3.45pm. Free admission - retiring collection in aid of the Humanitarian Aid Relief Trust. Singers please email cfc@abingdon.org.uk if you wish to attend. Chorus rehearsal (optional) at 2pm.

WITNEY: United Service for Week of Prayer for Christian Unity to be held at 6pm at High Street Methodist Church.

Friday 22 January

FINGEST: Hambledon Valley, near Henley. Healing service with laying on of hands and anointing at Holy Communion at 10.15am.

Services at Christ Church Cathedral

Sundays: 8am Holy Communion; 10am Matins (coffee in Priory Room); 11.15am Sung Eucharist; 6pm Evensong.

Weekdays: 7.15am Morning prayer; 7.35am Holy Communion; 1pm Wednesday only Holy Communion;

6pm Evensong (Thursday Sung Eucharist 6pm).

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Tel: 01865 276155 www.chch.ox.ac.uk

Details 01491 571231.

Sunday 24 January

OXFORD: The Council of Christians and Jews are joining the special service at Keble College, Parks Road, Oxford at 5.30pm to commemorate Holocaust Memorial Day.

Wednesday 27 January

PLough WEDNESDAY: This day will focus on aspects of rural and agricultural issues. The day will include a tour of Clive Cox Racing Stables in Lambourn with a talk by the Revd Graham Locking; lunch at Sheepdown organic farm and closing prayers by the Vicar of Lambourn with a reflection of the day by The Bishop of Reading. To book your place and for further details email: glynpe@tiscali.co.uk or phone 01295 788021.

Saturday 30 January

NEWBURY: St Nicolas Church Hall at 7pm. Quiz night - £6.50 per person including fish and chip supper. Details 01635 38851 or email c.gregory@tiscali.co.uk. Book your place before 17 January.

ABINGDON: St Helen's Church. 'Winter Warmer' coffee morning at 10am - 12 noon followed by soup and ploughman's lunches at 12 noon - 2pm.



Bishop John at Plough Wednesday last year

Courses & special events

Wednesday 13 January: The 2010 marriage course starts and runs for 8 weeks. Each session is from 8pm - 10pm in St Nicolas Church Hall, Newbury. Details from www.st-nicolas-newbury.org/marriage-course or 01635 47018.

Thursday 28 January: Lecture at University Church of St Mary the Virgin in the High Street, Oxford at 5pm. 'Early Tudor England: A People's Reformation?' by Professor Diarmaid MacCulloch (presenter of BBC4/BBC2 series

'The History of Christianity'. Details at www.victoriacountyhistory.ac.uk/oxfordshire.

Spring Term 2010 Learning for Discipleship and Ministry courses: This is a rolling programme of courses that is open to all learners of any denomination. It educates for lay discipleship, Licensed Lay Ministry, Local Ministry ordinands and other Authorised Ministries. The courses begin in January. For details of all the courses phone 01865 208277 or email sheila.townsend@oxford.anglican.org

Advertising Feature

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The arrival of Don Lavender at the Renewal Centre, with his exceptional experience, is like a ray of sunshine.

In the USA he worked with multi-addictions for 25 years. With colleagues he was treating 600 families a year before coming to the UK.

Don feels the Renewal Centre's ambience is ideal for the gentle family therapy needed for those suffering the effects of alcoholism in a relative, friend of colleague to which it is dedicated in its vision. Family therapy is his professional passion.

The characterful, calming barn conversion has a beautiful stained glass window with a butterfly lifting off a honeysuckle around which are the words LOVE ONE ANOTHER. It depicts the process of the family living with alcoholism without knowledge: grubbing around like a caterpillar, trying to cope with the inevitable trauma and profound effects: getting to a crisis point of



the chrysalis and its metamorphosis with the beginning of the recovery process. The result is the emergence of the butterfly in its flight of freedom.

It is a much-neglected need in the UK where Don says we are 15 years behind the USA. The specialism of addiction needs education.

The foundation is laid for my God-given vision to materialise. The adjoining accommodation is prepared in Honeysuckle Barn.

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Sally

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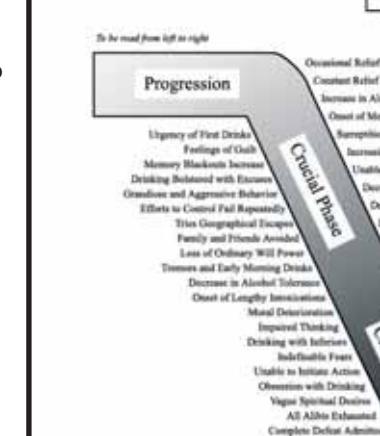
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The progression and recovery symptoms listed are based on the most reported experiences of the addicted persons in the disease of alcoholism or other chemical dependencies. While every symptom in the chart does not occur in every person, or in the same sequence, it does portray an average chain reaction. The entire process may take years or it may occur in a very short time.



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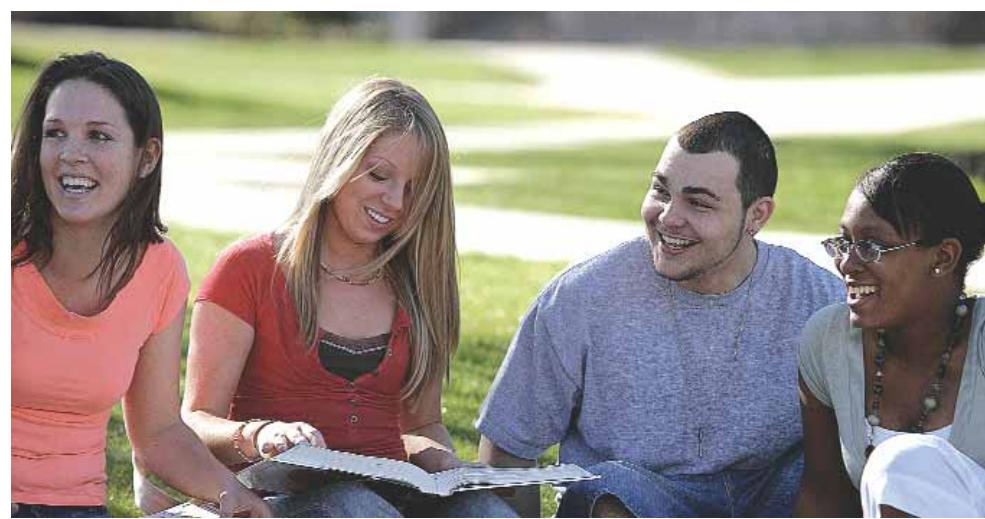
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Important decisions to be made when considering your child's education

Deciding on a school for your children is a tremendously important choice.

In many cases a child's primary and secondary education can have repercussions throughout life.

With growing concerns surrounding much of education in Britain today, it should come as little surprise that Christian schools maintain their popularity with parents, providing a strong spiritual and moral basis in all that they do.

The more disciplined style of education seems to bear fruit and their academic results continue to impress and in many cases improve.

ANGLICAN SCHOOLS

Anglican schools continue to be popular and are approached by parents from across the denominations, as well as other faiths, who wish to ensure that their children can enjoy a start to life based on a firm foundation.

Recent research by the Church of England has shown that faith based secondary schools are better at building community cohesion than their secular counterparts. The research, led by Prof David Jesson of the University of York analysed the Ofsted reports of various schools. It found that secondary schools run by faith groups scored eleven per cent higher for their promotion of community cohesion when compared with secular schools.

Many schools will be starting the new year with entrance and open days in order to select pupils for the September 2011 intake and to give parents and potential pupils the chance to look around and see what is on offer.

You will find faith based schools in both the state supported sector offering free education whilst others can be found in the Independent schools roster.

Many of these schools will attract pupils from the local area as well as those who make use of the boarding facilities.

Cost is a deciding factor for many parents who might well feel

that they cannot afford the fees that many private schools charge, overlooking the fact that in many cases bursaries are available for suitable pupils who come from a background that does not have the ability to pay large fees.

Many parents start saving when their children are young in order to finance them through secondary or higher education.

It's worth checking with your bank or building society to see what sort of schemes might be available.

MORE TO SCHOOL THAN EXAMINATIONS

It isn't just the academic side of school that's important, although we all know how much relevant examinations decide our futures, it's all of the other activities as well. A good school will therefore be looking at sport and the arts.

These both help to develop the whole person as we are each of us so much more than a bank of knowledge.

Many schools offer the opportunity of travel or adventure training in order to broaden the mind.

DECIDING ON THE FUTURE

It's a very similar story with further education and many pupils will be looking towards subjects to study at A Levels and then on towards degrees or other forms of further or higher education. The subject chosen for A level will very often determine the degree subject.

A lot of prayer and advice will be undertaken in deciding what path to follow, even when inherent talents seem to make the choice a little more obvious.

AN ONGOING JOURNEY

For all of us, education has become an ongoing subject. Whether on learning skills for work, updating our knowledge on a subject to keep in touch with current thinking or practices or merely that in its own way education and discussion can be a great way to relaxation and a fulfilled leisure time.



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Letters & comment



Comment

by Jo Duckles

Not right keen on mornings

I get up at the crack of dawn without fail for at least half an hour with God to set me up for the day ahead. 'Yeah right' is the cry from anyone reading this who knows me. I don't have a gift for getting up in a morning, particularly in winter.

Often I'll start my Monday by getting up 'early' and having a good quiet time (prayer and Bible study). But as the week goes on that will dwindle into an arrow prayer as I cycle to work still digesting the toast I wolfed down in 30 seconds flat. When this happens I do try and have some time with God at some other point of the day. I think it's really important and that's why I'm so excited that Bishop John has made 2010 the year of *Sustaining the Sacred Centre*. (For more on this see page two and pages eight and nine.)

To highlight this, I've swapped around some of the pages and you are reading letters and comment at the back of the paper, and will have already seen the Prayer and Reflection piece and the prayer diary taking pride of place on page two.

I'm also excited that the Diocesan Worship Prayer and Spirituality Group has listed going for a walk or other outdoor exercise as one of its recommended ways of *sustaining the sacred centre*. I don't understand how anyone can walk, run or cycle through the countryside and fail to worship God.

So throughout 2010 we'll be running some walks/pilgrimages around Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Berkshire that have a particular spiritual significance. We'll be starting the series by the Revd Sally Welch, of St Giles, Oxford, in February.

And we hope that we'll be able to include readers favourite spiritual walks on our website. Please email yours, complete with routes, maps and photos, and the reason why it is special to doornews@googlemail.com.



the Door

Editor: Jo Duckles Tel: 01865 208227

Email: jo.duckles@oxford.anglican.org

doornews@googlemail.com

Editorial Assistant/Distribution: Debbie Dallimore

Tel: 01865 208225 Email: debbie.dallimore@oxford.anglican.org

Advertising: Roy Perring Tel: 01752 225623

Email: roy@cornerstonevision.com

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Walkers take part in the annual St Birinus Pilgrimage, one of the diocese's many spiritual walks, in June. Pic: Christopher Baines



Thought for the month

by David Winter

And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. Luke 2: 7.

The Christmas Nativity Play, in nursery, school or church, may not have been long ago, or may be about to happen, but it's amazing how quickly the memories fade (though in this case quite a few are trapped electronically, to be reviewed at family gatherings over the years).

But even without video, we can easily recall the general scene - Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, and of course the baby Jesus (probably a doll) lying in a manger. Usually we have to imagine the animals, though sometimes an ingenious teacher will manage to dress up a few willing volunteers as assorted sheep and oxen. It's all rather lovely and, of course, performed under the strictest conditions of health and safety. The straw is from the pet shop, guaranteed free from noxious bacteria. The costumes have all been washed and ironed. And the manger has seen nothing of left-over cattle feed or stray droppings from over-enthusiastic sheep.

But try to imagine what it would *really* have been like, just under two thousand years ago. The real Joseph and Mary were too late to get a place in the

crowded 'inn' - not exactly your local Premier Inn, more like a rather basic camp site. The town was crowded because of the census, but in view of Mary's advanced state of pregnancy they were allowed to bed down in what was probably a stable (we aren't actually told, any more than the Bible tells us anything about an unhelpful inn-keeper, much less his more sympathetic wife).

This wouldn't have been a terrible hardship for them - most people lived and slept with the domestic animals all the year round. No self-respecting modern midwife would have accepted the conditions, of course. Forget clean straw - it wouldn't stay clean long in a stable. Forget a disinfected crib - a 'manger' is just a fancy word for a feeding trough.

Forget nice, clean, respectable shepherds. They lived with the sheep 24/7, for heaven's sake - what do you think they would have *smelt* like? There, in conditions familiar to poor people the world over, then and now, the Saviour of the world was born. That is the true message of Christmas. That's what we've all been singing about and celebrating over the last few weeks. When God came to be 'one of us' he did it properly - not as a king, emperor or general, but as the son of a peasant couple from an obscure village in an obscure province of the mighty Roman empire. Yes, 'Glory to God in the highest' - and 'glory to God in the lowest', too.

Canon David Winter is a former Diocesan Adviser on Evangelism, former BBC head of religious affairs, a broadcaster and author of many books.

Audio version

Sight impaired people can now get a free audio version of *The Door* by contacting Graham Winterbourne on **01884 840285**

Competition Winners

Christine Watson from Newport Pagnell and Dr Richard Bainbridge from Holton, Oxford were the winners of the competition featured in the December issue of *The Door*. They have both won a copy of '*Five Stones & A Burnt Stick*' by Ernesto Lozada-Uzuriaga Steele.

LETTERS

ADVENT PODCASTS

Thank you so much for including a note about these podcasts in the latest issue of *the Door* - I've just listened to the first one and really appreciated it. (For the record, I'm a retired oldie living way out in the sticks of north Oxfordshire but fortunately with a good broadband connection!)

Please pass on my congratulations to Canon Newell. I look forward to listening to the next one in the series in due course. Have a blessed Advent and Christmas.

Naomi Bowen, Wigginton, Oxon

Big print prayer books wanted

The Abbeyfield Oxford Society is a small home for the elderly in St Clement's, Oxford.

We are looking to supplement our stock of Books of Common Prayer - preferably the Oxford University Press edition which has a larger typeface, and which has gone out of print. We are just wondering if any church has a few copies tucked away, which are no longer needed and which we could put to very good use. We are happy to make a donation.

Jo Curtis, Abbeyfield Oxford Society, 80 St Clement's, Oxford, OX4 1AN. Email admin@abbeyfield.org



Comings and Goings -

The Revd Pam Shirras will take up post as Assistant Minister at Peachcroft Christian Centre; **The Revd Will Pearson-Gee** will take up post as Rector in the Deanery of Buckingham; **The Revd Andrew Rycraft** will take up post as Associate Curate at Charlton on Otmoor; **The Revd Simon Brignall** has resigned from his post in Thame; **The Revd Megan Daffern** will take up post as Chaplain at Jesus College; **The Revd Malcolm Hunter** will take up post as Co-ordinating Chaplain at Aylesbury Young Offenders Institute; **The Revd Will Watts** will take up post as Priest in Charge at Basildon with Aldworth & Ashampstead; The following have been given permission to officiate: **The Revd Canon Francis Woolley; The Revd Canon John Brown; The Revd Canon Robert Teare; The Revd Sheila Rosenthal; The Revd Dr Stephanie Bullock.** We recall with sadness the deaths of The Revd Bernard Robert from Wendover; The Revd John Davis from Oxford; The Revd Colin Shaw from Aylesbury.

God in the life of...

Flt Lt John Clayton tells Jo Duckles about high octane motorsports, his tour of duty in Afghanistan and his faith.

We were rallying through the mountains and were the fastest crew out of the Land Rover challenge by a significant margin but rolled it on a bend. Eventually we got it back on four wheels and got it going again,' says John, talking about last month's Rally of Scotland, the second biggest rally in the country. He was given time off to be part of the Armed Forces crew in the race.

John became a Christian when a friend took him along to his secondary school's Christian Union, which happened to meet on the one night of the week when he wasn't doing sport. 'The world all seemed to make a whole lot more sense, how the ecosystem fits together if you see it through Christian eyes. I don't think the idea that the whole thing was an accident ever made sense to me, so I accepted there must be a God,' he says.

A career in business or finance didn't appeal to John, who wanted to do something altruistic. Now a Flight Lieutenant in the Air Defence Headquarters at High Wycombe, he served in Afghanistan for seven months in 2007.

'We had rockets fired at the base on a regular basis,' he says. 'You had to carry a side arm at all times. You could never really relax. I deeply regret when collateral damage is caused. When a bombing mission catches innocent people in the crossfire it undoes a lot of the good work that we do.' But he says building relationships with the Afghan army, staff and security personnel and helping rebuild what the Taliban destroyed was rewarding. 'We made friends with them, showing them not all westerners are the great Satan from the west and that we were there to help them, to bring security to their villages.'

'Playing with the children was fun and



Flt Lt Clayton at the High Wycombe HQ. Pic: John Cairns

the whole point, was to bring security and reconstruction. You can't have reconstruction without security, John says.

'We had rockets fired at the base on a regular basis'

'The Taliban will just blow up the new buildings or destroy the well you have made. You have to show them you have more to offer than the Taliban. You bring progress in terms of schools, healthcare, infrastructure and all the rest.'

'It made me appreciate how much we take for granted in this country and how nice it is to live in a peaceful and developed country, things like being able to call the police rather than just being on your own waiting for people to knock on your door and kill you.'

John took advantage of the multi-

denominational church on the base, which held six services each Sunday and provided welfare facilities for the troops. 'We did a bit of Bible study and the church was a recreational place where you could watch films and have some comfort. The rest of the base was pretty spartan.'

In some ways, it isn't easy to be a Christian in the forces. 'It can be fairly isolated because there's a laddish culture in the forces and when we are at home in the UK there can be a lot of peer pressure to 'knock 'em back' after hours, says John. 'On the other hand many military values are Christian. These are self-sacrifice, devotion to duty and helping others, forbearance in difficult situations and living without material comforts.'

'There's an awful lot of good about the military values and there are parallels with Christian values. The military has quite openly accepted this. Sir Richard Dannatt, the recently retired Chief of the General Staff (the head of the Army) is a

committed Christian.'

The forces are making full use of John's passion for motorsports, providing him with time off for events like the Scotland rally because they raise the military's profile. And he uses the experiences to help share his faith with others. He also volunteers with Christians in Motorsport.

He says: 'Church wasn't giving me much of an opportunity to serve. I'm not musical or gifted in children's work or scriptural teaching. You have to use what you have got and exploit it to the max for the Kingdom. A passion for motorsports is something I have been blessed with so that's why I do it.'

John is married to Kerry and worships at St Andrew's Church, Oxford.

ONLINE

See www.christiansinmotorsport.com to find out more.

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